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## **Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays October 22, 2002**

This General Accounting Office (GAO) study captures the voices of the brave men and women of the reserve components who serve an increasingly vital role in U.S. battle plans. They take their oath to serve with deadly seriousness. In turn, they expect the Department of Defense to protect their health, and to care for them if they become ill as a result of their service.

That has not always been the case when it came to the anthrax vaccine, and we now know more about the negative impact of the heavy-handed immunization effort on retention of highly skilled service members.

As we consider sending young American men and women into a toxic Middle East battlefield once again, this study offers an important caution. Whether the threat is anthrax or smallpox, the Department of Defense cannot rely on vaccines alone to protect service members from chemical and biological weapons. There is no absolute immunity to chemical and biological contamination.

While inoculations are an important part of force health protection, vaccines and other medical interventions are no silver bullet. They are no substitute for individual and collective protection – gas masks, suits, detectors and shelters. Physical protective gear is effective against all agents. Vaccines protect against only one at a time. We will never have enough vaccines to counter nature's varied, and growing armory of viruses, bacteria and toxins.